

## For publication

### Review of Cemeteries Fees and Charges 2021/22 (HW390)

<b>Meeting:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	15 December, 2020
<b>Cabinet portfolio:</b>	Health and Wellbeing
<b>Directorate:</b>	Leisure, Culture and Community Wellbeing

#### **1.0 Purpose of the report**

- 1.1 To set the Council's cemeteries fees and charges for the financial year commencing 1 April 2021.

#### **2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that an increase of 6% is applied and the 2021/22 fees and charges as detailed in Appendix A, be approved.
- 2.2 To give delegated authority to the Bereavement Services Manager to reduce Fees and Charges if and when necessary, similar to the Authority given by the Joint Crematorium Committee. The Manager will explain scenarios where this is likely to happen during the meeting.

#### **3.0 Reason for recommendations**

- 3.1 To generate income to contribute to the costs of providing and maintaining a burial service.

#### **4.0 Report details**

- 4.1 Chesterfield Borough Council are responsible for the management of four Council cemeteries; Brimington, Staveley, Boythorpe and Spital. The cemeteries service is managed within the Bereavement Services Section who also manage the crematorium on behalf of the Chesterfield, North East Derbyshire and Bolsover Councils.

- 4.2 Cemeteries fees and charges are subject to annual review, with revised fees and charges implemented on 1st April each year.
- 4.3 In preparing this report, the Council's adopted general guidelines on charging for services have been considered.
- 4.4 The Cemeteries Service is currently subsidised with approximately 87% of controllable costs recovered from fees and charges. In setting the annual fees and charges for Cemeteries, proposals in this report have been considered;
- The reduction in the number of burials taking place in recent years (*cremation -v- burial currently 80% -v- 20% both locally and nationally*).
  - The need for the Council to achieve a balanced budget.
  - The level of fees and charges levied by other authorities in our family group and local cemeteries providers.
- 4.5 A Comparison of charges has been carried out, reviewing fees and charges made by other authorities in our family group (table1) as well as those made by surrounding authorities (table 2).

Table 1: Fees of "Family Group" Comparator Authorities 1 April 2020

Authority	Interment Fee	Exclusive Right of Burial	Exclusive Right of burial (CR)	Interment Fee (CR)	Non-resident fees?
Mansfield	£595	£1326	£740	£180	No
Ipswich	£1080 purchased	£1546 £215 extra depth	£1546	£221	No
Worcester	£918 single depth £1081 double depth	30/99 years £826 / £2121	30/99 years £413 / £795	£347	Yes
Gloucester	£1072 £470 Extra depth	50/75/99 years £733/£1115/£1859	£289	£233	No
Carlisle	£780	30/50 years £742 / £1245	30/50 years £260 / £433	£238	No
Newcastle U Lyme	£932	50 years £1256	£621	£408	Yes
Average Fee	£923.33	£1558.83	£737.33	£271.16	4 No 2 Yes

Chesterfield Borough Council	£900	£1114	£404	£303	Yes
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Table 2: Fees of "Local" Comparator Authorities as at 1 April 2020

Authority	Interment Fee	Exclusive Right of Burial	Exclusive Right of burial (CR)	Interment Fee (CR)	Non-resident fees?
Amber Valley Borough Council	£691	£611	£305	£129	Yes
Sheffield City Council	£1200	£1400	£630	£210	No
Derby City Council	£819	£1160	£330	£130	No
Derbyshire Dales District Council	£736.40	£655.90	£211.10	£155	Yes
Erewash Borough Council	£810	£865	£225	£205	No
High Peak Borough Council	£813	£700	£350	£210	Yes
North East Derbyshire District Council	£740	£607.50	£363	£148	Yes
South Derbyshire District Council	£499	£692	£332	£146	Yes (Triple)
Mansfield	£595	£1326	£740	£180	No
Average Fee	£767	£890.77	£387.33	£168.11	5 Yes 4 No
<b>Chesterfield Borough Council</b>	£900	£1114	£404	£303	Yes

*\*Note to Tables:*

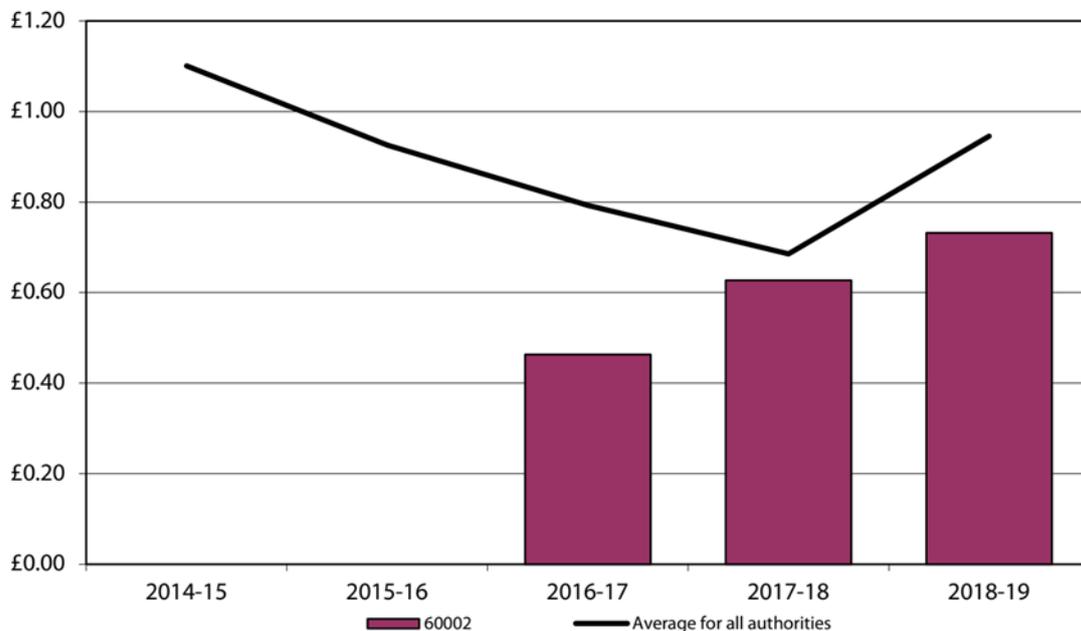
*"Interment fee" is the price for each burial in a grave and is payable in addition to the Exclusive Right of Burial Fee"*

*"Exclusive Right of Burial Fee" is the price to purchase the right of burial in a grave. The owner of this right must authorise each burial in the grave and has the automatic right to be buried in the grave at the time of his or her own death.*

*"CR" - cremated remains*

- 4.6 Members will note that the Council's fees, whilst being above the local average, are still below the family group average. Some comparator authorities will almost certainly increase their fees again in 2021-22.

- 4.7 For 2020/21 the controllable cost of cemeteries is forecast to be around £300,590 and the income is expected to be approximately £260,920 meaning that there is an expected net subsidy of £39,670, and that income now covers around 87% of the controllable cost of the service.
- 4.8 Should members approve fees and charges for 2021/22, as set out in Appendix A, it is estimated that burial numbers will continue to be consolidated and approximately 90% of controllable costs will be recovered.
- 4.9 Higher than average fee increases since 2014/15 (when a 30% increase was introduced) has seen the % of controllable costs recovered increase from 50.01% in 2013/14 to 81.68% in 2019/20. At this stage last year, a higher than inflation rise of 6% was approved.
- 4.10 Chesterfield Borough Council participates in the Cemeteries and Crematoria APSE benchmarking process. Please find below an excerpt from the 'Direction of Travel' report received by the Bereavement Services Manager which shows that Chesterfield Borough Council is below the average for net cost of cemeteries service per head of population.



## 5.0 Impact of Covid 19

### Additional expenditure

5.1 There have been several one-off expenditures in the Financial Year to date including;

- a) Preparation of 3 vaulted graves in Muslim Section.
- b) Hire of two additional vehicles to protect vulnerable staff from vehicle sharing.
- c) Purchase of materials to prepare graves in advance including timber and shoring.
- d) Secondment of one member of staff from Spirepride during the Months of March – June.
- e) Extension of Contract to Seasonal Staff Member for one additional month to support Gravedigging operation and leaf clearance.

### **Burial and Strewing of Cremated Remains**

During the height of the pandemic, the burial and strewing of cremated remains was postponed for three months, in line with guidance, to concentrate efforts on cremation and full burial funerals. The average number of cremated remains burials through April-October over the past 3 years is 66 whilst in 2020, 50 have been undertaken since restrictions were lifted. Although 50 have been carried out in a condensed time, some bereaved families have understandable reservations about making arrangements in the current climate and some may be postponed until further notice which in turn may see reduced income in the Financial Year.

### **Full Burials**

Please find below a table which shows the number of interments in the Financial Year to date from 1st April 2020 to 31st October 2020 compared to previous years.

In the last three years, the average number of full burials in the same period is 65. In 2020, 66 have been undertaken. Although numbers noticeably increased during the first wave of the pandemic, the number of full burials since August has fallen and it is estimated that the budgeted number of burials will be achieved but not be exceeded.

APRIL-OCT	CREMATED REMAINS (NEW)	CREMATED REMAINS (RE-OPEN)	FULL BURIAL (NEW)	FULL BURIAL (RE-OPEN)
2020	22	28	36	30
2019	14	35	26	35

2018	20	48	38	37
2017	29	53	34	26

## 6.0 Implications for consideration – Human resources

6.1 There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

## 7.0 Implications for consideration – Financial and value for money

7.1 The Council's general guidelines for charging include an aim to recover the full cost of the service except where:

- There is an opportunity to maximise income; or
- Members determine that a reduction or subsidy should be made for specific reasons

7.2 The proposed fees and charges for 2021/22 therefore aim to ensure that:

- the service continues to move towards cost recovery
- our fees remain competitive helping to ensure we provide an affordable service.

## 8.0 Implications for consideration – Legal

8.1 There are no legal or data protection implications arising from this report.

## 9.0 Implications for consideration – Risk management

9.1 Details of the risks associated with increasing fees and charges are given below.

Description	Impact	Probability	Controls to be Implemented
Below expected take up of services generally	Reduced income	Medium	Income from cemeteries is largely subject to fluctuations in the death rate, however, price sensitivities can be a factor. Proposed fees will be comparable with neighboring authorities.
Users choosing to	Reduced income	Low	Most bereaved families have a connection to local cemeteries.

use facilities elsewhere			Continue to build sound relationships with Funeral Directors who may influence the final decision.
Adverse publicity	Criticism of authority	Medium	Prepare good reasoning for the increase in fees and charges and that they remain below comparable authorities.  Improve standards in cemeteries.

## **10.0 Implications for consideration – Equality and diversity**

10.1 Funeral payments are normally the first costs to come out of the deceased's estate. Where there is a shortfall a DWP Funeral Payment, an element of the Social Fund, provides help to people receiving specified income-related benefits and tax credits. This can provide a contribution towards the costs of a simple, respectful, low cost funeral. The payment covers the full cost of specified expenses (i.e. cemetery fees and charges) plus up to £700 for Funeral Director expenses.

## **11.0 Alternative options and reasons for rejection**

11.1 Members could decide not to increase fees and charges, however, the cemeteries service is already subsidised.

11.2 A larger increase could be applied to fees, however, this may result in burial being an unaffordable option in turn seeing a reduction in the number of burials and a drop in income generated.

11.3 Members could abolish or reduce the non-residents fee, however, this could result in greater demand for plots and eventually lead to a decline in available space for residents of the Borough.

## **12.0 Summary**

- 12.1 During the Financial Year to date, the Council have authorised one-off additional expenditure to prepare for the ongoing Pandemic whilst carrying out activities in a Covid safe working environment.
- 12.2 The guidance to postpone cremated remains burials may see a fall in income. Although a considerable number have been arranged, in a condensed period of time since restrictions were lifted, some bereaved families are understandably reluctant to make arrangements at the moment and the budgeted figure may not be achieved in the current Financial Year.
- 12.3 Although full burials increased during the first wave of the Pandemic, they have fallen since August to an average number in the Financial Year to end of October overall.
- 12.4 The recommended increase will move towards cost recovery and contribute towards any costs after 1st April (yet unknown) in response to the Pandemic.
- 12.5 It should also be noted that fee increases are not the only way to work towards cost recovery. The Manager and colleagues are reviewing all our expenditure (for example hire of JCB in 2020) to look at ways to reduce our costs.
- 12.6 Provision of Natural Burial within the Borough could also be explored along with a scheme to renew Exclusive Rights of Burial that have since expired.

## Decision information

<b>Key decision number</b>	990
<b>Wards affected</b>	<b>All wards</b>

## Document information

<b>Report author</b>	
<i>Bereavement Services Manager</i>	
<b>Background documents</b>	
These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when the report was prepared.	
<i>This must be made available to the public for up to 4 years.</i>	
<b>Appendices to the report</b>	
Appendix A	Proposed fees and charges for 2021/22